1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

mortar, with solid, carved woodwork. Masons and carpenters from Malabar build them, and Coorg ancestral houses consequently resemble greatly the houses of well-to-do Nāyars. The house is usually situated on an elevation, and a narrow, high-walled and winding lane (*ōṇi*) leads up to it. From the windows in the upper story one usually obtains a fine view of the surrounding country. Formerly, in the days when feuds, or *kuḍupi* (*kuḍippaka* in Malayāḷam), between joint families were common, and a surprise raid (*kaḷḷa paḍé*) from a hostile *okka* was always a possibility, anyone coming with unfriendly intentions exposed himself to view from the windows of the ancestral house. The house was built like a fortress and was able to stand a siege for several days.

The ancestral estate usually includes an extent of jungle, some grazing land, and valleys in which rice is grown. The jungle provided the household with the necessary timber and fuel. A part of the jungle is reserved for burying or cremating the dead members of the *okka*. There is a kitchen-garden near the main building. A well or pond provides water for domestic purposes.

Every house includes an ancestor-shrine or ancestor-platform. Uncarved stones, representing cobra-deities, are planted on platforms built around the trunk of a milk-exuding tree. There may also be other uncarved stones representing minor deities like Pūda and Guḷika.

According to Lewis Rice,[1] in the seventies of the last century the Coorg *okka* frequently consisted of twenty or thirty, and occasionally even fifty members, all residing under one roof. He further tells us that previous to the invasion of Coorg by Tippu Sultan in the latter half of the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon to find in a house thirty or forty adult male relatives living together. Many *okkas* seem to have had 120 to 150 people, all living in the ancestral house.

Nowadays the *okka* commonly consists of two or three generations of agnatically-related males, their wives, and their children. Girls born in the *okka* go out on marriage as residence is patrilocal, but it sometimes happens that a woman remains unmarried for a variety of reasons. In such a case she stays in her natal *okka*. An *okka* also includes the widow of a deceased member. As mentioned earlier, leviratic unions are preferred amongst Coorgs, and a widow

[1] *Mysore and Coorg*, Bangalore, 1878, vol. iii, p. 329.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

Formerly every Coorg akka had one or more Paleya or other low-caste families attached to it as slaves. This was again an hereditary relationship, and between families and not between individuals.

II

In Coorg the agnatically related males form a corporate body enjoying the bulk of the rights in the *okka*. Men, thanks to patri-locality, are assured of continuous residence in the *okka* to which they belong, whereas the women have to leave their natal *okka* on marriage and become members of their conjugal *okka*. The men have a sense of belonging to the *okka* which is absent in all but the oldest women. A girl has to leave her natal *okka* on marriage, and this break in residential continuity is an important factor having legal and other consequences. It takes a long time[1] for her to be accepted into her conjugal *okka*: only when her children are grown up does she have the assured sense of belonging to her conjugal *okka*.

Sons are the comfort and hope of parents. They are the pillars of the *okka*. They are the means by which the *okka* continues to exist, and the continuity of the *okka* is a matter of the most profound concern to the members. Daughters are destined to leave their natal *okkas* and the children that are born to them enrich and perpetuate a different *okka*.

A woman is not a member of an *okka* in the sense a man is, and the legal rights she enjoys are always inferior to a man's. There are compensations, however. A man enjoys his legal rights in one *okka*, whereas a woman enjoys hers in two, her natal and conjugal *okkas*. A girl is maintained in her natal *okka* till her marriage, or throughout her life if she decides to be a spinster. She has the right to return to her natal *okka* if, for example, her husband is impotent, or suffers from an incurable illness, or if her mother-in-law does not treat her properly. She has a right to return to her natal *okka* if she is divorced, assuming of course that she had not been divorced for a serious offence such as adultery with an Untouchable. Should she be guilty of such an offence she is thrown out of caste irrevocably and this means that she loses her rights in both her natal and her conjugal *okkas*.

At marriage her relatives give her gifts of jewellery, clothes, and vessels. These remain her property, and in the event of her divorce she brings them back to her natal *okka*.

[1] Cross-cousin marriage makes it easier for the girl to be absorbed into her conjugal *okka*.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

conjugal *okka* and reverts to her natal *okka*. Such reversion is automatic and not conditional upon the unanimous consent of the members of her natal *okka*. But if a woman has been divorced for a grave offence, her natal *okka* might decide to have nothing to do with her.

4. Children of unsanctioned unions are referred to as *mai kaṇat makka* and they do not enjoy membership of their father's *okka* as legitimate children do. In fact, they are not members of any *okka*. Usually, however, elders bring pressure on the lover's kindred to the grant of membership for the children in the lover's *okka*. But if this is impossible, the children are made members of their mother's natal *okka*.

If the children of an unsanctioned union and their mother are given membership in the lover's *okka* while both the woman and her lover are still alive it is called *bendu* (relative) *parijé*. If, however, the father dies before the children and their mother have been given *sammanda* in his *okka*, then the elders try to see that *sammanda* is given at least before the corpse is disposed of. Such a belated granting of membership is called *kuṭṭa* (funeral pyre) *parijé*. This enables the widow to take part in the funeral rites.

5. A boy from outside is adopted when there are no agnatic descendants in an *okka*. *Sammanda* is performed, giving the boy in question membership of the heirless *okka*.

6. Adoption is not, however, necessary if there is an unmarried girl (or even the widow of a dead member) in the *okka* without an heir. The girl is then married according to the custom of *okka parijé* by which the children of the marriage become members of their mother's natal *okka*. The man himself ceases to be a member of his natal *okka* and becomes instead a member of his wife's natal *okka*.

The institution of *makka* (children) *parijé* is resorted to when it is impossible to find a man willing to leave his natal *okka* and become a member of the heirless *okka*. *Makka parijé* is a sanctioned union between the daughter of the heirless *okka* and a man who, while remaining a member of his natal *okka* and performing his duties by it, also agrees to raise up seed for the heirless *okka*. He usually stays in his natal home and visits his *makka parijé* 'wife' only occasionally. The children of this alliance are members of their mother's *okka*. It is usual for the *makka parijé* 'husband' to have a wife married to him in the normal way and living with him in his natal home. The children of the latter union, unlike the children of

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

responsibility of Mother Kāvēri and the ancestors of Muthamma's *okka* to see that the couple have sons, and prosper'.

It is essential to note that in a *makka parijé*[1] union the husband does not acquire any rights in the *makka parijé* wife's house, except the right to food and clothing during his stay there.

Adoption is resorted to only when there is neither an agnatic male descendant nor an unmarried girl in the *okka*. Formerly, during the time of the Lingāyaṭ Rājas, the ruler's permission was necessary for an adoption, and for an *okka parijé* or *makka parijé* union. This was because these devices could be used to shut out a distant agnatic male relative. But it is certain that the local elders would have tried to prevent an adoption to defraud a distant agnatic kinsman.

Two of the three devices for ensuring the continuity of an *okka* threatened with extinction because of the lack of agnatic descendants involve the granting of membership to an outside male, while the third does not. But whether membership of the *okka* is granted or not, each of the three customary devices is enveloped in ritual and involves the gathering together of the concerned relatives, family friends, and villagers. The legal and social consequences of each device are made clear at a solemn ritual occasion held in the sacred ancestral house of the *okka* whose continuity is threatened.

X

The implications of marriage, its rights and duties, are made clear at the performance of *sammanda* ritual. Most of the rites performed subsequent to *sammanda* dramatize the transfer of the girl from her natal *okka* to her conjugal *okka*.

To begin with, the groom goes to the bride sitting alone in the kitchen of her natal house, performs *mūrta* to her, and presents her with a purse containing coins (*chila paṇa*). The groom ties the purse to the frontal breast-knot of the bride's *sari*, but before doing so he unties the purse presented earlier by the mother. Thus the purse presented by the groom replaces the purse presented by the bride's mother. The newly created affinal bond replaces the uterine bond. In a patrilocal and patrilineal society,

[1] *Makka parijé* is not restricted to unmarried girls only. For instance, a widow might be called upon to raise up seed for her conjugal *okka* by entering into a *makka parijé* alliance.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

when a girl is married she passes from her mother to her husband. Her mother is the person for whom she has the greatest affection, and the replacement of the mother's purse by the groom's purse explains much better what happens than mere words can.

After performing *mūrta* to the bride, the groom helps her to get up, and walks with her to the door of the kitchen. He crosses the threshold first, and then, standing on the outer side of the threshold, he offers his right hand to the bride standing in the kitchen. The bride takes his right hand with her right hand and then crosses the threshold. This act symbolizes her exit from her natal home: the kitchen is the normal sphere of activity of a woman, and it stands for and is associated with women in the minds of ordinary people. Thus when the groom helps the bride to cross the threshold of the kitchen of her natal house, the participants are made to realize the loss occasioned to the bride's natal *okka* at marriage.

The bridal pair go in state to the groom's house. The bride salutes the sacred wall-lamp, and then sits on a sacred bench in the central hall, after which she salutes the elders in the groom's house.[1] Normally a woman may not sit on the sacred benches either in the central hall or veranda, and when an exception is made in the case of the bride it is as a recognition of the fact that she has acquired membership in the groom's *okka*.

Later, the bride goes with two married women to the cattle-shed where three new reed-baskets, filled with cow-dung, are kept. Each carries a basket to the groom's rice-fields and empties it in one of the ridged-up plots where rice is grown.

Accompanied by her two companions the bride then goes to the domestic well. She worships the water in the well, and this is called *ganga pūja* or 'worship of the Ganges'. Each of the three women carries a vessel of water to the kitchen.

The duties of a woman normally include carrying manure to the fields and fetching water from the domestic well. When the bride carries manure to the groom's fields and carries water into the kitchen of his house she is doing something which she will have to do every day for the rest of her life. She ritually takes up her duties in her husband's house, and frequently on ritual occasions two people accompany the subject in the tasks he or she performs. The reed-baskets are left at the field for Poleya servants of the

[1] In some parts of Coorg she also salutes the south-western pillar and the lamp in the south-western room.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

instance of the silent and effective transformation of an original Coorg custom into a similar, though not identical, Sanskritic custom.

A girl ought to get married and become a mother, and a mother is honoured among Coorgs. The bond between a mother and child is the most intimate of bonds and this fact expresses itself in ritual. While other relatives, including the infant's father, become free from birth-pollution on the twelfth day, the mother becomes free from pollution only on the sixtieth day. The stronger the bond prevalent the longer is the period of pollution, and this is so in birth as well as death.

When an infant whose milk teeth have not appeared dies, it is buried without ceremony, and a half of a coconut shell containing milk from the mother's breast is kept over the grave. Only the mother is required to take a bath and change into pure clothes.

The special importance of the maternal bond is recognized at marriage also: the mother is the first person to perform *mūrta* to the bride or groom, provided she is not a widow. The mother has to give her money-gift enclosed in a purse, and this is tied to the frontal breast-knot of the bride's *sari*.

It is not only in ritual that the strength of the mother–child bond is acknowledged: a number of proverbs testify to its strength. One compares the motherless child to a crop in drought. Another tells us that the father becomes a firebrand after the mother is dead. In proverbs the mother is the tender figure and she contrasts with the father who is comparatively lacking in affection and fickle. He can be trusted only as long as the mother is alive, and once the mother dies, his affection for his children decreases. He is likely to take up another wife who will be the focus of his interest and attention.

The dependence of children on their mother later gives way to great regard and respect for her, and this fact complicates the husband–wife relationship. A man does not like his wife's criticizing his mother, and even if he discovers that his mother does not treat his wife properly he would be loath to intervene.

The bond prevalent between a mother and her daughter is always a very deep one, and has a great poignancy because the daughter, on marriage, has to leave her natal home for her conjugal home. The mother is aware that her sons have all the rights, privileges, and power in the ancestral house, whereas her daughters have to leave their natal home and spend their lives among people who will, to say the least, be critical of her in the first few years.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

The daughter looks upon her natal home as a haven of refuge in the first few years of married life. Her first confinement takes place in her natal home because it is considered proper for the girl to be with people with whom she can be at ease.

A proverb tells us that 'the mother's love for her daughter rendered her unfit to live with her husband, the sitting hen's love destroyed the egg'. An overfond mother tries to drag her married daughter away from her husband, and this might eventually break up the marriage.

The elementary family, which is a part of the *okka* or joint family, is weakly structured among Coorgs. This is because the *okka* is so strong that it does not permit the elementary families inside it to be strong units. There is no separate term for the elementary family.

The solidarity of the elementary family does not obtain expression in ritual. It is true that the affinal tie is very strongly emphasized in mourning, and the eldest son is a mourner of the first grade, and sometimes a younger son or daughter is also called upon to become a first-grade mourner. But usually the younger children of the dead person are not distinguished from the other younger members of the *okka*.

The fact that the elementary family is weakly structured among Coorgs does not mean that it has no solidarity; and in the last 120 years its solidarity has been increasing at the expense of the solidarity of the *okka* of which it is a part. Coorg ancestral houses are large, sprawling affairs, and the members of each elementary family within an *okka* occupy either a room, or a couple of rooms, or an entire wing. Sometimes they occupy one of two or three houses belonging to the *okka*. A member of the M-*okka* once told me, 'When this house was built over seventy years ago there were only two or three people in it. But our ancestors were so wise that they built a large house with a number of rooms so that all their descendants could live in it.' Now each of the married brothers and his children occupy a room or a couple of rooms inside it.

The unity of the elementary families within the *okka* appears in certain non-ritual contexts. For instance, parents take sides with their own children against the children of another member of the *okka* in the frequent quarrels of children. A proverb tells us that 'the *okka* went to ruin over the children's talk'. Quarrels arise when 'the children of the *okka* play together, and these children's quarrels

hold duties for 60 days to recover her normal health, and devote herself to her baby. During this period she daily bathes in hot water after having been well rubbed with castor oil before a charcoal fire. The robust health of a Coorg woman is no doubt due to the care taken by them during pregnancy and confinement.

Naming Ceremony

As soon as a Coorg boy is born, a little bow of a castor oil plant stick with an arrow made of a leaf stalk of the same plant is put into his little hands and a gun is fired in the courtyard. He is thus at taking his first breath introduced into the world as a future hunter and warrior. This ceremony is not generally now observed. On the twelfth day after birth, the child is laid into a cradle by the mother or grandmother who gives the name, which in many instances is well sounding and significant. Boys are known by Belliappah, Ponnappa, Mandanna and girls Puvakka, Muthakka and Chinnamma. The Coorg women are very prolific and bear children to the extent of ten or twelve. In cases of necessity a wet-nurse is engaged, but infanticide is not practised.

Family

The Coorg family is of the patriarchal type. It is the domicile of all male relatives and their children belonging to one parental stock. Two or three generations, grandfather, grandmother, their sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and other children numbering from 20 to 60 or even more in some cases, all live and mess together. The labourers who were once their slaves belong to the family and depend on their mistress for food and orders. So long as there is peace and harmony, a Coorg family is a fine example of the patriarchal type. Every domestic affair of importance can be undertaken only with the consent of the senior member. He is expected to look after the principal needs of the family and its members individually and check irregularities of all kinds by sound discipline. The nature and extent of his control may be gathered from the fact that married sons and their wives choose their residence under the paternal roof to avoid the responsibility of a separate establishment. The senior female member is the queen of the household, and holds a corresponding position among the junior members and their wives and daughters. The peace and harmony of the family that once prevailed may be marred by discord, by the harsh treatment of an imperious mother-in-law, by the jealousy and heart-burnings of the married members of the material questions affecting the family income and individual claims. The senior member who is the Karnavan of the family has no easy position under such circumstances. The domestic life under normal circumstances is brightened by the affection of the children for their parents and relatives, and the little ones, of whom there is generally a good number, are in turn great pets of the family. The bearing of the young in the presence of the old is decorous, but the grown-up members are not

596 generally well guarded in the use of proper expressions in their talk with the young. The educated men of the present day exercise a potent influence for good in the normal conversation, and show due respect to their [607] brother's wife with whom no familiarity is allowed. There is a tendency [178] at present among the discontented members to break up the ancestral family [578] by a division of the family property among the members.

Property and Disposal

423 The property of the Coorgs consists chiefly of the ancestral house
425 and the land belonging to it which under the Rajas was held on a feudal
177 tenure and on a light assessment termed *jamma bhumi* or birthright land, because it was inalienably vested in the family or house, and the British Government confirmed the settlement. Additional land was taken up by them on the *sagu* tenure, but, in course of time, Government allowed to some extent such *sagu* land to be converted into *jamma* land. Other land held as jahir was granted for certain Government service as *umbli* land on a light assessment. During the last thirty years, many houses have opened out coffee plantations on their own or Govern-
434 ment land, or rented cardamom jungles. Thus the actual wealth of the
421 Coorgs consists of landed property and their prosperity depends on the
596 exertions and means of cultivation; but imprudent enterprises and un-
[556] expected reverses have caused much embarrassment. Formerly, all the members of a Coorg house lived together in the ancestral home or in some outfarm, *koppu*, neither of which could be alienated nor subdivided among the members of the family. All of them worked for the common good under the management of the *yajamana* or *korakara*, and had their subsistence on the proceeds. Any surplus on the annual reckoning became
[433] the property of the house for providing incidental expenditure on the occasion of marriages, funerals, and other ceremonies, as also for the purchase of new land in the interest of the family. If, however, an individual member by becoming a salaried officer or by coming into possession of money through marriage, was enabled to enter upon private speculation without any aid from the ancestral house, any property or acquirements thus made became his private property and were left at his own disposal by gift or will. Many young men have thus become
● [591] separated from the ancestral house and established a new homestead, and as long as they contributed to the expenses of the former, they maintained
[182] their share in the proceeds. This is the proper mode of setting up a new house. Disintegration is now setting in, and some try to break up the ancestral houses by a division of the landed property among the members.

Adoption

597 The right of adoption is given to every Coorg house in the absence of male issue, or by an unmarried man or woman or widower in order to secure the inheritance of personal property or rights.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

356 The house and yard are generally kept clean and orderly,
574 and the announcement of an approaching honored visitor sets at once the broom into activity and you may arrive just in time to see the retreating Coorg damsel and have to swallow the raised dust. However, the object is attained, you perceive what attention has been paid to you.

312 A stone built deep well is usually in the compound or the
[515] water is fetched from a hole sunk by the side of the paddy-fields, and near the well is the hut for hot bathing.

357 The low caste servants have their huts at some distance
564 from the Coorg house; the meals given them they eat on
361 plantain leaves apart from their masters.

264 As already remarked the Coorg house is the domicile of all the male relatives with their wives and children belonging
• 59 to one parental stock. The landed property, or Jamma-pâmi,
423 is vested in the house and cannot be alienated from it, or
[476] divided amongst its members. The farm is cultivated by all
[241] the housepeople under the management of the master of the house, and the produce is divided amongst them after the Huttari feast. It often occurs, however, that an energetic member of the house or one in Government employment, acquires for himself some fields called Koppa, which are his own, and if sufficient for the support of his family, he may
591 live there and establish a new house. Others own a small
423 coffee plantation or cardamom-garden, and these individual
178 enterprises seem to be the natural transition to an impending general social reform—the breaking up of the great houses, and the independent establishment of each married couple residing near their own paddy-fields, and eating the fruit of their own labour. The indolent will then have to work for their subsistence or sink into misery, the industrious and thrifty will prosper, and after a period of no little angry strife a happier life of personal freedom and domestic felicity will be the inheritance of future generations. The only danger to be apprehended is the tendency of the rich houses absorb-

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

ing the poor ryots and reducing them to a state of servitude. A wise Government will, however, watch with solicitude the spontaneous development of the reform, and the more it is the work of the people themselves, the surer will be its successful accomplishment.

591 423 178

b. Prescriptive law of inheritance.

428

Sons, grandsons, brothers, brothers' sons, daughters, daughters' sons, cousins and adopted sons have the right of succession to inherit property successively in the order here mentioned. Property, in default of offspring, on the death of a man devolves on his widow; if he leaves a son under age, the widow is his guardian, and takes possession of the property. If the deceased leaves neither wife nor sons, but a grandson and a brother, or a brother's son, the property is divided, provided the family be undivided; but if it be divided the grandson takes possession of the whole property. The law of primogeniture, however, now prevails and division is strictly prohibited.

If the deceased leaves neither wife, nor children, nor grandsons, the property devolves on his brother or his brother's sons, if any, as the nearest relations. In cases where the deceased has left neither wife nor sons nor brothers, but a daughter not married, the relations of the family put her in possession of the property, and dispose of her in marriage, and on her death her husband or her sons inherit it. But if a man dies leaving a daughter not married, and a brother's son or a grandson, the family being undivided, the property used to be liable to a division. In failure of the preceding persons, the property used sometimes to descend to the cousins, and sometimes not, as the Government determined. In cases where the deceased leaves a son under age without relatives to protect him, the Government appoints the head of the village to act as guardian to the boy and to take charge of

429 428 [884]